

NWCCU Letter - Release Cover.

Joint message from Board Chair Davies, President Johnsen, & Chancellors Caulfield, Sandeen, and White

On September 26 UA's institutional accreditor, the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities (NWCCU), forwarded a letter to the Board of Regents, President Johnsen, and Chancellors Caulfield, Sandeen, and White "expressing concern as to the ongoing efforts to respond to the funding challenges faced by the state's institution of higher learning."

The letter specifically called out stakeholder feedback and recent media coverage in emphasizing the need for "clarity around the authority, roles, and responsibilities of the University of Alaska System and its respective institutions and their leadership," and the need to "create a space for *inclusive dialogue* as the Board of Regents deliberates on the future structure of the University of Alaska System." The letter also stated that "[NWCCU] is concerned that [UAF, UAA, and UAS] have failed to meet" the related "critical" accreditation standards. The letter raised no concerns about the quality of academic or research programs.

We are releasing that letter today (attached) and providing our assurance that the Board, the president, and the chancellors appreciate and share the concerns raised by NWCCU regarding the difficult process of responding to deep budget cuts and re-shaping the university. We have been and will continue working closely with NWCCU, are following up with the Commission, and holding an emergency meeting of the Board to ensure that we are working together effectively and inclusively, with a clear understanding of our respective roles and responsibilities.

At the same time, while we have narrowly avoided a devastating \$136 million one-year cut, we must find a way to serve students and the state while completing another \$70 million reduction in state support by July 2021. Given prior reductions, the long lead time for program reductions/consolidations, and our obligations to students, that is a formidable challenge.

Recognizing the change in circumstances and the anxiety created by the uncertainty of the past eight months, on September 13 the Board clarified its direction to specifically request options for administrative and academic consolidations including under the current three university structure.

The Board also expressed its support for additional time for process and input from the chancellors, faculty, students, and staff. That input is being received through extensive public process, a recently completed survey, and faculty, staff, student, and community participation in a series of expedited academic program and unit reviews.

While this process was designed to meet accreditation requirements as well as fiscal realities, the board, the president, and the chancellors are working together to ensure that this process meets NWCCU accreditation standards, making adjustments as needed.

The Board will receive a report from the president and the chancellors on those reviews in November and, depending on the recommendations, may determine that additional time is needed in order to ensure that improvements can be made while accreditation is maintained.

Working together—the Board, the president, the chancellors, and the entire university community—we will successfully address those challenges, just as we faced the veto crisis, with hard work, and a strong commitment to the university's mission of service to our students and our state. As President Johnsen has said repeatedly, we will take no action that jeopardizes accreditation. We will provide a separate response to the Commission to address full compliance with NWCCU standards.